



Call to Worship - Hebrews 13:1-3 *Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.*

Hymn - 499 - Great God, your love has called us here

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGRBhG_V4RI&list=RDYGRBhG_V4RI&start_radio=1

Great God, your love has called us here,
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,

but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.

Brian Wren (born 1936) © 1975, 1995 Stainer & Bell Ltd

Prayer : Great God, we worship you. We look behind and the path our lives have taken lies mapped out. We look ahead; a mystery of options. Myriad opportunities and multifarious perils. We look beside us and you are there, Your steadying hand guiding us. You carry a safety net to catch us if we fall, You are the ladder on which we climb to get past obstacles.

Great God, we praise you. For love and care shown, For patience and perseverance We praise you for you never fail us. We trace you in our successes And we feel you in our vulnerabilities. You know when we are safe And you know when we are in great danger.

Great God, we thank you, For never failing, and for patience, For not leaving us to drown in our own mess, Saying 'I will tell you how' not, 'I told you so'. We confess our sins, The great mistakes and the little slips; We repent of wrong, The wilful disobedience and innocent blundering.

Father, please forgive us, for the sake of your Son, Jesus our Lord who lived for us, Jesus our Saviour who died for us, Jesus whose resurrection shows your love for us. Holy Spirit, embolden us in our attempts to turn from sin, Give us courage to say no to old mistakes, Guide us in new paths and may we always Stife to do your perfect will.

Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven...

Introduction to theme - The path of life

As people we like to mark our ends and beginnings. Terms in school and at college or university are entities in themselves. Moving jobs is similar. This is the time of year when the academic year begins and new agendas are set. In the Methodist Church, new ministries are beginning, after the goodbyes of a few weeks ago. In daily life the path does not always have so many distinct junctions, starts and stops. Much of it is a development and a continuous meander through a maze of choices about direction. The readings today look at the underpinning principle of where God is in life, and the way we associate with people and how we come across.

Hymn - 362 - Meekness and Majesty

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXggFYQQTJ0&list=RDqXggFYQQTJ0&start_radio=1

Meekness and majesty,
Manhood and Deity,
In perfect harmony,
The Man who is God.
Lord of eternity
Dwells in humanity,
Kneels in humility
And washes our feet.
*O what a mystery,
Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship*

*For this is your God,
This is your God.*

Father's pure radiance,
Perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross.
Suffering to give us life,
Conquering through sacrifice,
And as they crucify
Prays: 'Father forgive.' *Refrain*

Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
Love indestructible
In frailty appears.
Lord of infinity,
Stooping so tenderly,
Lifts our humanity
To the heights of His throne.
Refrain

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Readings - Jeremiah 2:4-13 and Luke 14:1,7-14

Hymn - 322 - How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoPlwPUYWaw&list=RDNoPlwPUYWaw&start_radio=1

How sweet the name of Jesus
sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our
wounds,
and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary rest.

Dear name! the rock on which I
build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury filled
with boundless stores of grace.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Brother,
Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

'Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton (1725-1807)

Sermon - Poor choices (Jeremiah 2:11) *Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.*

I seem to remember, many years ago when I went off to Agricultural College, being given a lecture about being careful who I mixed with. My parents, it was probably my mother mainly, had a real obsession with 'not being influenced by the wrong people'. I am not sure that I ever was warned about how I might influence others; perhaps there was an unspoken assumption that other people would have their own self protection in place.

Whatever my mother's concerns, I have never been a gregarious person and quite unlikely to get into groups if I can avoid it. When I read Jesus's warning about not taking the best seat at the wedding or not currying favour by inviting the right people home, I am delighted. Does that mean I can stay at the back and avoid dinner parties? Good news. Not that this is the point of the reading!

Europe today is in a state of adjustment. At the point of writing this, leaders are talking and we are awaiting the outcome of the next steps concerning the future of Russia and Ukraine. If, by the time you read or listen to my words they are hopelessly wide of the mark, sorry. Achieving the settlement of any sort of dispute is painful; settlements require give and take on all sides and that will include dealing with the pride of formerly entrenched positions.

Jeremiah was living in a time of change in the late seventh century BC. Judah was politically fragile and in between the waning Assyrian empire and the beginning of the ascendancy of Babylon. It was a time when foreign alliances were

important and that included taking seriously foreign Gods. Judah's own God, unsurprisingly, was unimpressed. The path of life presents choices constantly, which at a very high level come down to people and values. Whether the people are the wedding guests, the people one invites home or the nations in political juxtaposition, it is all about people. The values are the benchmarks, the checks and balances, the decision-making processes that determine the quality of choices made. Judah, Jeremiah made clear, were making poor choices.

In the verse I have used as a text, Jeremiah starts with a rhetorical question, 'has a nation ever changed its gods?' to which he adds the rueful aside, 'yet they are not gods at all'. This is meant to make us think, to see the absurdity of Israel's behaviour. The point is that those who worship gods that cannot respond or communicate are loyal to the vacuum they value as valuable and have deified.

Loyalty is a powerful force when it is firmly held. The illustration may work less well for us now than it did in Jeremiah's day because there is less exposure to a range of gods in our society and we are not overtly influenced by immovable superstitions. We do have modern day equivalents, not all of them harmful. Loyalty to sports teams. Unshakable devotion to causes or affiliation to political parties. All may seem tame but they can become our 'gods' and we are often inseparable from them. That is not necessarily a bad thing in some cases.

Jeremiah's point is that if I can be totally loyal to a football team why not to God! The secondary statement is the shocking one. Not only has Israel lost its loyalty, but the nation has also chosen to throw over a proven and reliable God for trust in something that is, indeed, a vacuum. Why would you do that – I love the analogy of a leaky tank – it summarises worthlessness. You had plentiful, refreshing water and you opted instead for a desert... why would you do that?

In the cold light of day it is baffling now and it was baffling then – and yet some of us do make poor choices. The Psalmist wrote (106:20) 'they exchanged their glorious God for an image of a bull, which eats grass. Hosea noticed something else, namely that the more there is formal religious leadership the worse the behaviour of the populace, presumably because it became less essential to take personal ownership of the problem. (Hosea 4:7) 'The more priests there were, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their glorious God for something disgraceful.'

No one is sure who the author was of the first book of Samuel, but whether or not it was the man whose name it bears, we have there a statement of the changeless nature of God. (1 Samuel 15:29) 'He who is the glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.'

There we have it. As we make our way through life in times that are constantly evolving and changing, we should challenge ourselves to work out and hold on to our values. Poor choices come from pushing for dominance, toadying up to today's person of influence and altering our views with the wind. That way leads to emptiness and ruin; a godless, hollowed out shell of a person. Jeremiah referred to the plentiful life-giving resources provided by God, while Jesus said, 'those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

We make all this seem hard and make poor choices until we realise that to turn the situation round and reverse poor choices, we have but to stop being so arrogant and proud and ask God to forgive us – he will do it because it is not he who keeps changing his mind. Amen.

Hymn - 640 - We turn to God when we are sorely pressed Fred Kaan (1929-2009) © 1967, 1991, 1997 Stainer & Bell Ltd
Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhT06OxWsC0&list=RDvhT06OxWsC0&start_radio=1

We turn to you, O God of every nation,
giver of good and origin of life;
your love is at the heart of all creation,
your hurt is people's pain in war and death.

We turn to you that we may be forgiven
for crucifying Christ on earth again.
We know that we have never wholly striven
to share with all the promise of your reign.

Free every heart from haughty self-reliance,
our ways of thought inspire with simple grace;

break down among us barriers of defiance,
speak to the soul of all the human race.

On all who rise on earth for right relations,
we pray the light of love from hour to hour.
Grant wisdom to the leaders of the nations,
the gift of carefulness to those in power.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve the need of others,
help us to give and not to count the cost.
Unite us all to live as sisters, brothers,
defeat our Babel with your Pentecost!

Dedication of Offering : Giver of every good gift, We bring gifts to you. Giver of every talent, Teach us to use what we have. May the things we are and do Bring glory to you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession : *New beginnings come in many ways, at different times...*

God of new beginnings

Sian Joyner ©The United Reformed Church

God of new beginnings, Whose face greets us in the gurgling child; The trusting smile; that smallest prayer of joy To the Maker of Heaven and Earth...

God of new adventures, Who calls to us in the bumbling toddler, Unafraid to fall, knowing Your cradle Will bear them safely in Your Arms...

God of new possibilities, Who races at us with the energy of schoolchildren, Who knows just the right moment to ask *that* question – Who climbs trees, and grazes knees, And wakes up to do it all again tomorrow...

God of boundless energy, Of ceaseless trust, And of unending joy – Be with us now...

Pour Your joy into us, That we may see your face anew, And find pure delight in You. Amen

A prayer for the new Connexional Year (September 2024) *The Revd Jonathan Dean - London District of the Methodist Church*

Dear God: At the threshold of a new Methodist Year, we pause to reflect. Thank you, that in all that we have been through, on the roads we have travelled to this moment, you have been with us. Thank you too, that as we continue on our pilgrimage of faith, you promise to remain with us.

We praise you for your love, your faithfulness and your empowering presence. You call us as we travel onwards to love your world, and all that you've created, with your own transforming and liberating love.

Give us the humility to attend carefully to the communities we serve, and to the realities of their life...

Give us the wisdom to listen to our neighbours and to you, as we discern and live out our mission together...

Give us the courage, to take action for the sake of the Kingdom when you call us to do so...

Give us your Holy Spirit, to fire us with your love, to direct our journeying, and to bring us to new life and witness...

Travel with us, generous God, into the great adventure of life as the Church of Jesus, as heralds of your Kingdom, and as those in whom others can come to know your great love for them and for all creation. Amen

Please add your prayers for the local church family, in sorrow and in joy...

And also add prayers for those key things in the news this week...

Loving God, we bring these and all our prayers to you. We seek your blessing in our lives For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we pray, Empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn - 649 - God, when human bonds are broken Fred Kaan (1929-2009) © 1989 Stainer & Bell Ltd

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaYtn-UCNnU&list=RDEaYtn-UCNnU&start_radio=1

God! When human bonds are broken
and we lack the love or skill
to restore the hope of healing,
give us grace and make us still.

Through that stillness, with your
Spirit
come into our world of stress,

for the sake of Christ forgiving
all the failures we confess.

You in us are bruised and broken:
hear us as we seek release
from the pain of earlier living;
set us free and grant us peace.

Send us, God of new beginnings,
humbly hopeful into life;
use us as a means of blessing:
make us stronger, give us faith.

Give us faith to be more faithful,
give us hope to be more true,
give us love to go on learning:
God! Encourage and renew!

Dismissal : At this time of new starts, Of journeying on, Go into the world, Followers and leaders, Pilgrims and pastors To embrace life in its reality

The Grace : The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.